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THE BIBLICAL WORLD

VOLUME XXXVIII

OCTOBER, 1911

NUMBER 4

Editorial

THE RELIGIOUS DILEMMA OF THE MODERN MAN

By the modern man is meant, not every man of the present day or the average man, but the man who represents and embodies in himself the best ideals and tendencies of present-day life. Broadly speaking, he is characterized by a sense of the worth and the freedom of human personal life, by a spirit of brotherhood and democracy, by a conviction of the supremacy and centrality of the things of the spirit, and by a thirst for reality and confidence in the method of experience and criticism as he seeks to possess reality. Thus, in a word, he is a realist. While all these elements are not original with him, the combination is.

But we refer to this simply as a starting-point for a brief treatment of another matter. The modern man can neither accept nor reject either orthodoxy or liberalism, or the new-old religion of monism. Why is this? In each of these movements in their official, partisan capacity, with which alone we are concerned, there is something that the modern man cannot get on with, and also something that he cannot get on without. And it is this situation which makes his religious life difficult for himself and often misunderstood by others. Sometimes he must forego the next to the best thing in the world, which is the fellowship of religious faith. Indeed, this fellowship is supreme human enjoyment, but enjoyment is not the best thing. Veraciousness is better, and on this account he must thread his own way among these various parties.

What is there now that the modern man cannot accept in official and partisan orthodoxy? For one thing, there are its

dogmas which harmonize with only the ancient view of the world and of life and with the ecclesiastical supernaturalism of the Middle Ages. But it is not dogma even that is most offensive to the modern mind; it is the finishedness and fixedness of dogma, incongruous with a view of the world in which nothing is finished, and therefore nothing should be fixed. Even in the way orthodoxy presents the message of Jesus, there is something dogmatic in the bad sense of the word, giving that message the character of a religious law and demanding a specific conception of Jesus. For another thing, official orthodoxy has been so much concerned with the next world that it has seriously neglected the betterment of this. It has ever been too willing to identify itself with the ruling forces of this world—with money, might, monarchy, with political and social orders, while the gospel of the modern man seeks transformation of these orders, and triumph over the world of might by the world of right. Thus its devotion to the weak, the disinherited, and the belated elements of modern society falls far short of the ideals and enthusiasms with which the modern man is inspired. Still again—and this is perhaps the most serious criticism to be made here—orthodoxy has excluded the brother from his adequate and integral place in the *gospel itself*. God, the soul, the brother, these, in normal relationships making the kingdom of God, are the inalienable elements of our gospel. No one of these three as reality can be left out in its fulness and the gospel not be thereby structurally abridged. But too often “brother” does not mean everyone who wears the human countenance, but only those who confess the orthodox faith. More serious still, as mysticism restricts itself to “God and the soul, the soul and God” and luxuriates in its emotions, while the brother is not there; and as pietism indulges in its intimate feelings in the love of Christ, in the cross of Christ, in the wounds of Christ, while likewise forgetting the brother; so orthodoxy makes “sound doctrine” the center of Christianity, and in the interest of sound doctrine will mistreat, if not disown, the brother. This often leads to coolness instead of warmth, bitterness instead of good-will, oppression instead of freedom, division instead of union. It has ever been a fact that orthodoxy has violated Christian love and honorable controversy

in dealing with an opponent. Carnal weapons are used, such as misrepresentation, calumny, ridicule, and excommunication. It gives us no pleasure to recite these things but they indicate the elements in official and partisan orthodoxy which the modern man cannot endure.

But for all these and such as these, which after all have to do mainly with form, the modern man is increasingly aware that he cannot live a life of strength and depth and consolation and joy, as he ought, without the content of orthodoxy. What is that content? "God was in Christ." God's hand, God's power, God's world, God's life and love; these were in Christ. The inner world of Jesus Christ is the essence of God and therefore reveals the character of God and the attitude of God toward man. This is a truth which the orthodox dogma of the deity of Christ imperfectly formulated—a dogma, therefore, to be treated with due historical regard by the modern man, as, indeed, all dogmas should be. It is not enough for human need that Jesus should speak from the standpoint of time. The main thing is that Jesus Christ speaks to man from the standpoint of eternity. He is more than a great teacher, more than a religious genius and hero, more than a seeker after God, or a leader to God, and more even than Redeemer and Savior, as liberalism sometimes uses these words. He is not man's way to God so much as God's way to man. Jesus Christ is God manifest in the flesh; he is the revelation of the grace of God, and so the central message of orthodoxy is the forgiveness of sin through the mercy of God revealed in Christ. Thus it is because not simply the truth of man but the truth of God is reality in Christ that man's deepest longing, longing for the knowledge of God, for the nearness of God, for the fellowship of God, finds its satisfaction in the Christ of God. The question as to man always becomes, in the end, the question as to God, and we shall yet see that even our modern social question ends in the religious question. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." This is not a dogmatic theory but a fact. The life and death of Jesus Christ is the greatest fact of human history. In this fact we meet God both in his holiness and in his mercy in such a way that his holiness does not destroy us or his mercy condone our faults, but both redeem us and make us perfect as the

Father is perfect. This, and such as this, is the truth of orthodoxy, without which the deepest need of the human soul would find no adequate satisfaction. Without this truth we would not care to live at all.

But what now is there in liberalism that the modern man cannot get on with? It is what is not there! Official and partisan liberalism does not do justice to the inexorable holiness of God which judges and condemns us, or to the divine agony over sin and ruin, or to the depth of the divine mercy and long-suffering by which we are saved. Jesus is relegated so exclusively to the kingdom of the human that the mystery of God in him is faded, if not lost. It must be admitted, indeed, that the liberal preaching of the divine man Jesus can make a great impression, especially if it be done with power and depth. Still its religious defect cannot remain hidden long. The modern man misses in the message of liberalism the tone for which he is most wistful and the glow for which the religious heart yearns most. If liberalism says that God was in Christ, still it is not the great God of holy earnestness and forgiving grace that is there, and so it is a truncated and mutilated Christianity.

But for another thing, the judgment of liberalism with reference to the world and man is defective. It is too satisfied with the world as it is. Our gospel is concerned not so much with progress in civilization as with the overcoming of the world by faith, i.e., with the overcoming of its seduction, its deception, its transitoriness, aye, its death even, so that in the face of the apparent finality of death the Phoenix of our hope may rise ever anew out of the ashes of our despair. We miss this element of triumph over the world in liberalism. The soul needs to mount aloft. It craves a world-transcending asylum from shipwreck and solitude, from battlefields and the extremities of death. In a word, liberalism lacks severity, transcendence, denial of the world, and therefore does not measure up to the boldness and radicalism of the gospel with reference to these matters. In short, liberalism is too superficial in its thought of God, of the soul, and of the world, to satisfy the modern man.

But what is there now in liberalism that we cannot get on

without? It seeks to give up dogma yet to retain the best content of dogma. It seeks to find a modern form for old truths. It seeks also to bring the truth of Jesus into harmony with present-day thought and feeling. Especially does it impose on no one a law of faith, but allows the most diverse apprehension of Jesus Christ. And while, like orthodoxy, it lacks world-transforming power, it is yet trying to domesticate the kingdom of God in home and church and state. With all this, and such as this, the modern man finds himself in full accord.

While it would be not wholly true, yet it would roughly point to the truth, were we to say that the modern man accepts the content of orthodoxy but rejects its form, rejects the content of liberalism, but accepts its form. He cannot live, as he ought, without the truth of orthodoxy or without the freedom of liberalism, but since truth is more precious than even freedom, did he have to strike a choice between the two he would espouse orthodoxy.

The monistic religion remains, concerning which we have space for but a word. Both orthodoxy and liberalism go to Jesus and stop there, but monism proposes to replace and surpass Jesus, or, more strictly, it would keep Christ and discard Jesus. Only, the Christ of monism is idea or principle and not person. But ideas and principles are constructs of human heads and human hearts and cannot redeem. Only realities, only deeds, deeds of God in history at that, disclosures of God's power and goodness can redeem a man. Our gospel is not system or law or idea, any more than it is dogma or institution. And our God is not the monistic unity of God and the world, or the laws of nature, or some substance or cause. In the end, it will be seen that the modern man can accept only a personal God who is Lord and Judge of the world. Again, monism preaches a new man, as the gospel does, but its new man is the superman of Friedrich Nietzsche and not the servant of Jesus Christ.

But for all this, there are elements in this monistic religion that the modern man cannot dispense with. It is teaching us that God is not a God of the past only, but a living God of the present, so that we may live on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. Especially does it urge the important truth that religious

certitude is not dependent upon historical certainty. History that is mere history and not also a world of values can mean little for the man of today. This drawing of our spiritual possessions from fountains of living immediacy is a conviction which monism is urging most helpfully upon the modern world.

Even such a brief outline as this of a great subject convinces one that the modern man must "try the spirits." Using essential elements of the orthodox, the liberal and the monistic parties, he must yet seek a new way. Because it is new he will blunder; he will be led off into by-ways, and his feet will bleed and his heart be sore; but he is sure that he is fulfilling his mission according to the logic of history itself, and that in the end it will be seen that orthodox, liberal, and monist alike must turn to that truth which the modern man sees is in Jesus Christ, not for himself alone, but for all the world.